

Father-and-daughter actors Ron Cephas Jones and Jasmine Cephas Jones on a Zoom call.



KENT NISHIMURA Los Angeles Times

THIS HAS been one of the worst summers on record for most people, what with the pandemic, political divisiveness and social injustices plaguing the country. Even so, it's a pretty cool time to be a member of the Cephas Jones family. In July, dad Ron and daughter Jasmine earned Emmy nominations.

While Ron has been through this excitement before (he won an Emmy as William on "This Is Us"), this is Jasmine's first nomination — for the Quibi short program "#FreeRayShawn." But the 31-year-old actress has already experienced the "Hamilton" whirlwind, earning a 2016 Grammy for the Broadway smash's soundtrack.

The duo is remarkably close — despite living on opposite coasts. They recently Zoomed in together on a call with The Envelope and talked about taking advice from Philip Seymour Hoffman, how jazz and acting overlap, and why it's important to show up and just do the work.

What was it like to find out you'd each been nominated?

Jasmine Cephas Jones: I was walking my dogs and grabbing a coffee and somebody texted me and was like, "Congrats, Emmy nom!" I said, "That would be awesome, but I don't think I'm nominated." I went on Google and started crying.

Ron Cephas Jones: I was excited also but more excited that my daughter was nominated; that was everything for me. [She grew] up ... being dragged around in the theater for so many years.

Did you offer Jasmine advice when you found out she wanted to be an actor?

Ron: The advice I gave her was advice I continue to give her — it's all about the work. She's hung out with me in the theater company that I was involved in [LAByrinth] and two plays that I did [there] were both directed by [longtime theater leader] Philip Seymour Hoffman. Jasmine used to be at the rehearsals, and there

THE CONTENDERS

Acting doesn't fall far from tree

Ron Cephas Jones of 'This Is Us' and his daughter Jasmine of '#FreeRayShawn' share a philosophy: Do the work.

BY RANDEE DAWN

were two words that he said to me. And what were those two words, Jasmine?

Jasmine: You guys were in rehearsal and [Hoffman] was giving out notes, and he said, "You're acting."

Ron: "You're acting." Don't act.

Jasmine: It wasn't until I started studying Meisner [technique] where [I] was like hit over the head, and I was like, "I know what he means. He means live truthfully under imaginary circumstances."

And your mother is singer Kim Lesley, correct?

Jasmine: She is a jazz singer. And she was performing when she was pregnant with me. She was really big with this band called Paul Young in England.

Wait, '80s singer Paul Young, from "Everytime You Go Away"?

Jasmine: Yeah, she was one of the Fabulous Wealthy Tarts. She came to New York to follow her dreams and create a solo career.

Obviously, acting is key to your lives, but music threads through it for both of you — Jasmine's got a Grammy, and Ron, you were going to study jazz at one

point, right?

Ron: Well, if you look behind Jasmine [whose bookshelf displays several albums], it's a copy of Miles Davis' "Kind of Blue." That album was Jasmine's bedtime lullaby. When she was a little girl, I would put that on, as well as "Charlie Parker With Strings." [Parker's] nickname is Bird. I ended up nicknaming her Bird. It's a world that I've always been connected to, and I connected my daughter to it in a way that we could share the artistic and beautiful sound of it.

Jasmine: Jazz is a form of improv that if you study and really listen to, you know, it can also translate into your acting as well.

That give-and-take in jazz that translates into acting, you mean?

Ron: It's like organized chaos, but you know, like a band you have to work together and you have to listen. So, it's the art of listening to where your fellow musician or actor is taking you. And then go with that and giving and taking.

You both landed major breaks around the same time — 2015 for Jasmine with "Hamilton," and for Ron, "This Is Us" the following year. What was it about those productions that

grabbed you?

Jasmine: The first time that I heard the music from "Hamilton," it was something I've never, ever heard in my entire life. Immediately, I was like, "This is a game-changer." I walked into the audition not being in musical theater at all. And it was a very new world for me.

Ron: I had spent most of my career on the stage. Each time I would book a television show, it would last maybe one season or my character would get killed off in the second season. So, when I got that role on "This Is Us," it just was right. Everything about that character, I already knew from my history in the theater, from [James] Baldwin to August Wilson to Ralph Ellison to Richard Wright. So, when I read him, I didn't really have to do anything but just show up in the room. My blessing was that [show creator] Dan Fogelman noticed it.

And again, like I've taught my daughter, "Do the work and everything else will eventually happen the way you want it to happen." Or not really the way you want it to happen but in the way it's supposed to happen. So regardless of the time, my whole blessing is that my daughter is healthy, happy and pursuing that which she loves to do. And nothing, nothing could be greater for a parent than that. Nothing. ■